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AUTHOR Kuh, George D.; Farrell, Patrick J.
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ABSTRACT

In 1981, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) evaluated its national meeting in Cincinnati using four data-gathering strategies: (1) photography; (2) interviews; (3) a survey; and (4) immediate personalized feedback to conference presenters. This report emphasizes the findings from the interview and survey components of the comprehensive evaluation strategy. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide information to the ACPA leadership concerning the extent to which the annual meeting met the needs of student affairs professionals attending the conference. More specifically, the evaluation was guided questions involving who attends ACPA conventions, why student affairs professionals attend the meeting, and how satisfied were convention-goers with ACPA 1981. Three areas were identified as most important for attending the convention. These include placement opportunities, presentations or programs, and personal or professional development. (Author/GK)

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Evaluation of ACPA '81*

George D. Kuh
Patrick J. Farrell

School of Education
Indiana University-Bloomington
Bloomington, IN 47405

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EVALUATION OF ACPA '81

Few national organizations have undertaken systematic efforts to evaluate their national meetings. Typically, individual program sessions are monitored and some sort of brief questionnaire is distributed during or after the meeting to collect information of a summative nature. In 1981, the American College Personnel Association evaluated its national meeting in Cincinnati using four data-gathering strategies: (1) photography (see Brown, Sanstead, Schlake & Story, 1981); (2) interviews; (3) a survey; and (4) immediate personalized feedback to conference presenters. Because few presenters opted for the latter service and the findings from the photographic evaluation are reported elsewhere (see Brown, et.al, 1981), this report emphasizes the findings from the interview and survey components of the comprehensive evaluation strategy.

Purposes for the Evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to provide information to the ACPA leadership concerning the extent to which the annual meeting met the needs of student affairs professionals attending the conference. More specifically, the evaluation was guided by three questions: (1) who attends ACPA conventions? (2) why do student affairs professionals attend the meeting? and (3) how well satisfied were convention-goers with ACPA 1981?

Method

The data collection strategies were developed by George Kuh and Patrick Farrell and nine graduate students enrolled in an evaluation seminar at Indiana University (see Appendix A). This group assisted in the design of both the

survey instrument and the interview protocols used to gather the required information (see Appendix B). In addition to participating in the evaluation seminar, all of the evaluation team members participated in a four hour workshop specifically designed to enhance interviewing skills and learn the kinds of reporting procedures necessitated by this design. Role-play and other simulation excersises were used to provide the interviewers with practical experience and to aid in increasing awareness of potential problems likely to be encountered in the convention.

Over 400 person hours were expended in planning, implementing, and summarizing the evaluation activity reported here at a cost of about $450. In addition, over 200 hours were devoted by the photography team from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln at a cost of about $220.

The interviews were of two kinds: (1) expectations for the meeting or preformative; and (2) degree to which expectations for the meeting were met or summative. Both types of interviews were semi-structured in format and made considerable use of open-ended questions. In addition, all interviewees were asked to provide suggestions for next year's convention (see Appendix B for the interview protocols). All interviewees were also requested to provide demographic information such as age, ethnic background, years in profession, and so forth.

The survey was designed specifically to produce a demographic profile of typical convention attenders and their experiences. Several evaluation forms administered at previous conventions were used to design the form used in this study (see Appendix C).

Respondents

Fifty-four men and forty-eight women were interviewed between Sunday and Wednesday of the convention. Forty percent of this group were between the ages

of 26 and 30, twenty percent were 25 years of age or younger, and seventeen percent between the ages of 31 and 35. The majority (62%) had been in the profession ten years or less. Most of those interviewed were caucasian (83%) while 15% were black. Over 43% were involved in housing, student activities, or student union programming functions (see Table 1). In Table 1, additional biographical information concerning the type of institution at which the respondent was employed and membership in other professional organizations are presented.

Two hundred fifty-six men and three hundred forty-eight women completed the questionnaire distributed at the keynote address presented by Dr. Lee Knefelkamp. In general, the biographical profile of persons responding to the questionnaire was similar to that of persons interviewed (see Tables 1 and 2); the lone exception was underrepresentation of minority respondents to the survey.

Survey Results

Reasons for Attending the Convention

To enhance professional growth was the reason for attending the convention given by almost 95% of the respondents. The second most often mentioned reason was keeping abreast of new developments in the field, a response not substantively different from the former. Respondents were also interested in learning new skills that they could apply to their work back home (see Table 3).

Convention Arrangements/Schedule

The majority of the respondents clearly preferred well-researched topical presentations. Distinguished speakers were also considered important by 91%.

Value of the Convention

Over 90% of the respondents reported that the degree to which the convention was successful was related to how many new ideas they were able to acquire.

Interview Results

The three areas identified as most important for attending the convention were: (1) placement opportunities; (2) presentations or programs; (3) personal or professional development.

Placement. For 43% of the people interviewed, use of the placement service to secure a position or to screen candidates for openings on their respective campuses was the primary reason for attending ACPA. Several persons also indicated that they were attending the convention to prepare for a job search the following year or to assist those who are now using the placement service.

Presentations/Programs. Twenty-six percent of those interviewed indicated they were attending the convention for the purposes of gaining new ideas to be used on their campuses. Others also wanted to hear speakers who had an unusual perspective on the current situation facing student affairs work. In general, most were pleased with the quality of the programs although a vocal minority indicated that more in-depth kinds of presentations would have been preferable. A good deal of support was expressed for innovative convention programming such as idea breaks, theme tracks, and imbedded skill workshops. Several persons were frustrated because several programs of interest were offered at the same time.

Most persons interviewed felt that Cincinnati was an excellent or good location in which to hold the convention. Most felt the convention was well-organized and that convention personnel were helpful in answering specific

questions. Both the entertainment provided for convention-goers and the periodic fire drills in one of the convention hotels were mentioned by a number of interviewees.

Personal and Professional Development. Making new and renewing old acquaintances was important for over 46% of those interviewed. Also, professional development activities including learning new skills, obtaining new ideas, and improving the work of the profession were indicated by a comparable proportion of people. Getting away from the institution to gain a different perspective on their work was also mentioned by 9% of the respondents as an important aspect for attending the convention. Only 7% reported that involvement in the work of Commissions was a major reason for attending the conference.

Conclusions

Student affairs professionals attend the ACPA convention to maintain their links with the profession and to acquire new skills and knowledge that can help them do their jobs better. "Networking" or establishing new or renewing old professional relationships also seems to be an important activity and tends to comprise much of the time spent at the convention, particularly for those who have attended previous conventions or who have been in the profession for some time (see also Brown, et.al., 1981).

In addition, a substantial proportion (about 40%) of those attending the convention hope to make use of the placement service. Apparently many young professionals do not attend a large number of conference presentations and programs and, as a result, their perceptions of the association are likely to be substantially influenced as a result of their experiences with the placement service.

Suggestions for Future Conventions

Continued efforts are required to make certain the placement experience for both young and old professionals is rewarding. Several suggestions were offered as to how the "personal" nature of the placement service could be enhanced: adding dividers for interview spaces, separating the waiting area from the interview sign-up area, forwarding pre-convention correspondence to both candidates and interviewers describing what to expect during the placement operation, and encourating candidates and employers to make contact through correspondence prior to the convention.

Well researched and/or prepared presentations were considered very important by the respondents. Because many persons were hopeful to find new ideas and obtain new skills, perhaps more specific criteria should be used in program proposal review processes. That is, perhaps the Association could increase convention attenders' satisfaction by encouraging (requiring?) program presenters to include thorough literature reviews as part of their presentations and to emphasize practical applications of new ideas and developments. This could result in fewer higher quality and better attended programs, not unlike meetings of other professional associations. Several persons suggested that the target audiences for whom the program is designed be clearly identified in the program abstract. In this manner, the program is more likely to meet the needs of those who are attracted to the program by its description.

The convention site favorably impressed most respondents and the largest proportion indicated that the Cincinnati convention was well-organized and that the convention personnel were helpful. Even though pre-convention materials were mailed out earlier than ever and included a book of program abstracts, some respondents were hopeful that convention materials could be mailed out even earlier. Also, several suggested the desirability of special one-day convention registration rates; the importance of more programming addressing small college concerns was also underscored.

Epilogue

One unexpected outcome from this evaluation design was the positive impact verbalized as appreciation by those interviewed. Almost 5% of those attending the convention were interviewed. All expressed gratitude at the opportunity to visit with an interested colleague for 20 minutes or so about their professional expectations and reactions to the convention. Almost everyone was surprised but pleased the organization had taken time to find out in a personal way why convention attenders came to Cincinnati and how they felt about convention activities. Perhaps planners for subsequent conventions should consider some form of interview process to monitor convention activities as well as underscore the importance of people to a successful and productive professional meeting.

Reference

Brown, R.D., Sanstead, M.J., Schlake, D., & Story, K. Evaluation of the 1981 ACPA Convention through photography: Can a camera help? Teachers' College, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NB, 1981.

Table 1

INTERVIEW RESULTS

Sex		Age		Years in Profession	
Male	53%	(1) 25 or under	20%	(1) Grad. School	17%
Female	47%	(2) 26-30	40%	(2) 1-5 years	38%
N=102		(3) 31-35	17%	(3) 6-10 years	24%
		(4) 36-40	7%	(4) 11-20 years	17%
		(5) 41-45	10%	(5) 20+ years	5%
		(6) 46-50	2%		
		(7) 51-55	2%		
		(8) 56+	2%		
		N=100			

Ethnic Background		Professional Activity	
(1) Caucasian	83%	(1) Administration	31%
(2) Black	15%	(2) Career/P/C/	19%
(4) Hispanic	1%	(3) Housing/Stud. Act./	43%
(6) Arab	1%	(4) Education	2%
N=101		(5) Financial Aid	2%
		(6) Other; Learning skills, Alumni Activities, Comm. Aff.	2%
		N=98	

Types of Institutions		Member Prof. Assoc.	
(1) Public-2 year	2%	(1) NASPA	43%
(3) Public-College or Univ.	58%	(2) NAWDAC	8%
(4) Priv.-College or Univ.	36%	(3) ACUHO	9%
(6) Other	3%	(5) Other	37%
N=99		N=94	

Placement

Locate Candidates-20

Placement (get interviews)-24

Presentations/Programs

New ideas-27

Enjoyed idea breaks-9

Good Programs-9

Conflicting programs-7

Identify who the target audience is for the presentation-2

Programs on budgeting-1

Have new professionals meeting earlier-3

Convention Mechanics

Good location-15

Improve pre-convention materials-earlier and more detail-8

Well organized-14

Liked key-note speakers-8

Personal Professional Development

Get away from work-9

See friends and renew acquaintances-25

Professional Development-22

Meeting people in the feild of CPA-8

Commission work reason for attending-7

Table 2

SURVEY RESULTS

1. Sex: (1) Female 58%
   (2) Male 42%

   N=604

2. Age:
   (1) 25 or under 21%
   (2) 26-30 28%
   (3) 31-35 19%
   (4) 36-40 12%
   (5) 41-45 9%
   (6) 46-50 5%
   (7) 51-55 4%
   (8) 56+ 3%

   N=605

3. Number of years in the profession:
   (1) Graduate Student 16%
   (2) 1 to 5 years 34%
   (3) 6 to 10 years 21%
   (4) 11 to 20 years 23%
   (5) Over 20 years 6%

   N=601

4. Ethnic Background:
   (1) Caucasian 92%
   (2) Black 5%
   (3) Asian 5%
   (4) Hispanic 1%
   (5) American Native 1%
   (6) Other 1%

   N=599

5. Primary area of professional activity or interest:
   (1) Administration: vice-president, dean assistant dean, etc. 29%
   (2) Careers/placement/counseling 29%
   (3) Housing/residence life/student activities/student unions 27%
   (4) Education. professor, assistant professor, etc. 6%
   (5) Financial aid/admissions/orientation 6%
   (6) Other 4%

   N=591

6. Type of institution:

(1) Public two-year	6%
(2) Private two-year	1%
(3) Public college or university	61%
(4) Private college or university	31%
(5) Proprietary school	1%
(6) Other	1%

N=597

7. Membership in other professional associations:

(1) NASPA	31%	(4) AACJC	2%
(2) NAWDAC	10%	(5) Other	49%
(3) ACUHO	6%		

N=302

Table 3

SURVEY RESULTS

A. Attending this convention to:

2.	Enhance professional growth	94.9%
8.	Keep abreast of new developments in the field	94.3%
10.	Learn new skills to apply to my work	93.6%
3.	Renew my enthusiasm about my work	81.7%
1.	Initiate new professional contacts	72.6%
4.	Renew old acquaintances	63.7%
9.	Have an enjoyable vacation from work	57.6%
6.	Collect ideas for futher research	52.2%
7.	Find prospective employees	23.5%
8.	Find a new position	18.1%

B. Arrangements that are important to me:

15.	Well-researched topical presentations	94.7%
14.	Distinguished speakers	91%
17.	Panel discussions	76.7%
12.	Hotel accommodation and food	74.5%
18.	Audience participation	68.6%
13.	Parties and dinners	46.6%
16.	Placement opportunities	43.8%

C. Base the value of this convention on:

21.	How many new ideas I acquire	92.9%
23.	If I can discuss mutual problems with collegues	82.8%
20.	How much I enjoy myself	74.5%
22.	How many acquaintances I make	70.5%

D. I will be satisfied with the convention:

25.	If I become aware of a new concept, idea, program, or skill	95.1%
26.	If the program I am presenting is a success	42.3%
28.	If I secure a job lead	21.3%
27.	If I leave with candidates names	18.5%

Appendix A

ACPA Convention Evaluation Team

Evaluation Team Members from Indiana University-Bloomington

George Kuh, Director
Patrick Farrell, Site Coordinator
Shanseldin Abdin
Susan M. Anderson
Diane L. Breedon-Lee
Susan Bruggemann
Kris Kindelsperger
Deb Smith
Michele Stipnovich
Esther Walsh
Mary E. Wood

Evaluation Team Members from University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Robert D. Brown
Mark J. Sanstead
Denise Schlake
Kathy Story

Appendix B

Interview Preparation and Protocols

Interviewing

What is an interview?

dyadic communication
predetermined and serious purpose
interchange and recording behavior
the asking and answering of questions

Format

Open Questions

1. Primary Questions--introduce topics or new areas "stand out" questions
2. Secondary Questions--elicit more information asked for in a primary question
3. Neutral approach--respondent decides upon the answer without direction or pressure from the interviewer

Example

	Open	Closed	Leading
Primary	A. How do you feel about attending this convention?	A. Do you approve or disapprove of this convention?	A. Most of the people here approve of the convention; how do you feel about it?
Secondary	B. Why do you feel that way?	B. Is your approval moderate or strong?	B. If you approve of convention why did you you express negative comments?

Interviewing

A. You have to "believe" what we are doing is important.

B. Sincerity, thoughtfulness, honesty & genuine liking of the respondent as an individual far outweigh any "tricks of the trade."

C. Try to use the vocabulary of the individual. Try to skip jargon with new people and don't over use.
Be sure to ask for precise meaning when your respondent uses a jargon phrase or word.

D. Knowledge of the population--who are you interviewing--for what purpose

E. Be aware of non-verbal questions--support or non-support of verbal message

Body Language
Facial Expressions
Hand Movements
"Feet"

F. Give the respondent a wide range of response choices.

G. May want to use a group interview situation.

H. Be aware of different groups in your population.
May require different approaches.

I. The respondent has to be convinced of three major requirements:

"sell" 1. That this research is important, needed, and useful to others.

"sell" 2. Information given will be confidential.

"demonstrate" 3. Interviewers will be non-judgmental.

You are trying to establish "partners" in the interview process.

--Techniques--

1. Hypothetical Situation =
"imagine that you . . . "
use late in the interview, after you have established a comfortableness.

2. Examples =

   Have the respondent use examples to clarify a situation.

   "Has this occurred as of yet during the conference . . ."

   "When . . ."

   "Tell me about the situation . . ."

   Try to get the respondent to be specific.

3. Recapitalization = "Recap"

   "Let me make sure that I understand what you've said . . ."

   Rephrase your notes to the respondent.

Recording the Interview

Try to write down the national language of the respondent "quotes"

Try to identify the issues--you have to wade through the words.

Take down demographics--sex, age, type of institution, etc.

NOTES

Demographics sheet	Discussion
Issues 1. 2. 3. Send copy of report to:	

Interview Analysis--done quickly after you do interviews--complete interview on interview analysis form.

Interview Issues

Specific--"Be very specific"

Control--You are there to interview the respondent. It is your interview. Don't lose control, keep the respondent on track.

Rhythm--"You say a little, they say alot."

Respondent--make them feel comfortable; get them to feel at ease talking about themselves.

"Critical Shift"--tells you when your respondent is going to get involved or uninvolved.
Look for indications in non-verbal behavior. "Ques"

"Recap"--recap your notes before ending.

Ending--"Are there questions that I haven't asked that you feel are important?"

Would you like a copy of the results sent to you?

Name
Title
Address
City
State
Zip Code

Respondent Issues

A. Purpose/Expectations Interview

B. Summative Interview

Interview Process

There will be three basic types of interviewing:

A. Purposes/Expectations Interview

"What are some of the purposes/reasons you came to ACPA?

B. Reaction Interview

C. Summative Interview

"What did you like/dislike about attending the convention?"

"If you were on the planning committee for next year------"

Interview Interaction

Select respondent - Note why?

"Hi----(look at name tag)--------(mention name)

"My name is-------"

"I'm a member of the Convention Evaluation Team here at ACPA."

"We are interviewing a sample of the conferee's for the purpose of determining why they attend(ed) the convention and I need your help.

I'd like to take about 10 minutes to interview you--------(mention name)."

"Can we sit down?"

"I see your from----------"

"I'd like to take notes if you don't object----they help me recall our more precisely."

"What the evaluation team plans to do is to interview about 50 individuals during the convention and compile the information anonomously. Then we will submit a report to next year's planning committee."

Can you give me some background information. (use demographic sheet)

Key Q "What are some of the purposes/reasons you decided to attend ACPA?

Key Q "What are your reactions to the--------session you just attended?"

Key Q "What do you think of the convention thus far?"

Key Q "What is your reaction to the convention?"

Imagine you are planning the convention next year. How would you design the

convention next year? What changes would you make?

"Are there any questions that I haven't asked that you feel are important?"

"Would you like a copy of the results of our study?"

Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Interview Analysis

(Remember: Be Specific!!)

Type of interview
A. Responses
B. Reaction to_____
C. Summative

I. Pre-interview Preparation

A. Rationale for selection of respondent.

B. Collection of biolographical information and demographics - use demographics sheet.

Interview Analysis

(Remember: Be Specific!!) Type of interview
A. Response
B. Reaction to_____
C. Summative

II. Interview Write-Up

A. Narrative - Impartial summary of the interview.

Interview Analysis

(Remember: Be Specific!!) Type of interview
A. Responses
B. Reaction to_____
C. Summative

B. Critical Analysis

- Questions posed by you
- Emerging themes
- Concerns
- Suggested Issues
- Ambiguities
- Inconsistencies
- Unique contextual factors
- Striking affective/emotional aspects
- Should this interview be followed up? Why?

Interview Analysis

(Remember: Be Specific!!)

Type of interview
A. Responses
B. Reaction to_____
C. Summative

III. Self-Evaluation

- What were the strengths of this interview
- What were the weaknesses of this interview
- Corrective strategies you will use for the next interview.

Appendix C

Survey Questionnaire

INSTRUCTIONS:

Please help us learn what you want from the ACPA convention. The results will be used in two ways:
(1) to provide feedback for this year's convention planning team, and
(2) to provide information for next year's convention planning team.
Please use a #2 lead pencil to fill in the corresponding circles on the right hand side of the page.

1. Sex: (1) Female (2) Male

2. Age: (1) 20-25 (2) 26-30 (3) 31-35 (4) 36-40
(5) 41-45 (6) 46-50 (7) 51-55 (8) 56+

3. Number of years in the profession:

(1) Graduate student (2) 1 to 5 years
(3) 6 to 10 years (4) 11 to 20 years
(5) Over 20 years

4. Ethnic background:

(1) Caucasian (2) Black (3) Asian (4) Hispanic
(5) American Native (6) Other _____

5. Primary area of professional activity:

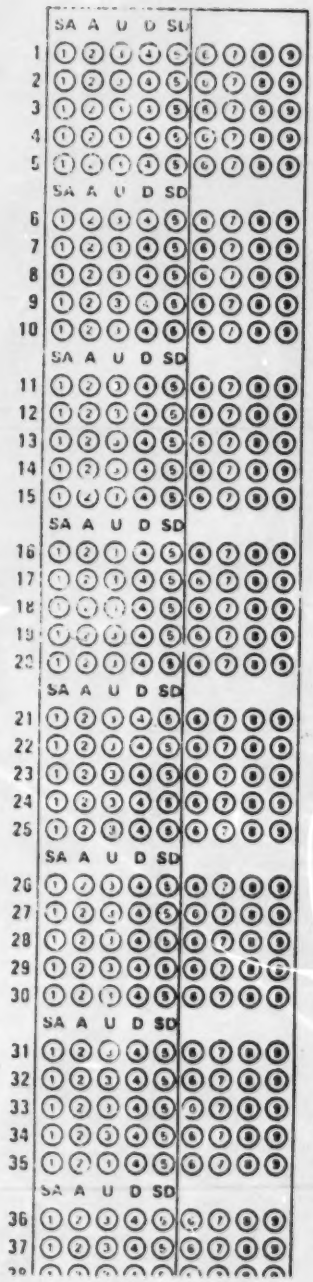
(1) Administration: vice-president, dean, assistant dean, etc.
(2) Careers/placement/counseling
(3) Housing/residence life/student activities/student unions
(4) Education: professor, assistant professor, etc.
(5) Financial aid/admissions/orientation

6. Type of institution:

(1) Public two-year
(2) Private two-year
(3) Public college or university
(4) Private college or university
(5) Proprietary school

7. Membership in other professional associations:

(1) NASPA (2) NAWDAC (3) ACUHO (4) AACJC
(5) Other _____



INSTRUCTIONS:

Please help us learn what you want from the ACPA convention. The results will be used in two ways:

(1) to provide feedback for this year's convention planning team, and

(2) to provide information for next year's convention planning team.

Please complete the following:

Using a scale from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).

Lst. Imp. 1 | Not So Imp. 2 | Import. 3 | Very Imp. 4 | Most Imp. 5

A. I am attending this convention to:

1. Initiate new contacts for my professional work.
2. Enhance professional growth.
3. Renew my enthusiasm about my work.
4. Renew old acquaintances.
5. Find a new job position.
6. Collect ideas for further research.
7. Find prospective employees for my institution.
8. Keep abreast of new developments in the field.
9. Have an enjoyable vacation from work.
10. Learn new skills to apply to my work.
11. Other _____

B. The following arrangements are important to me:

12. Hotel accommodations and food.
13. Parties and dinners.
14. Distinguished speakers.
15. Well-researched topical presentations.
16. Placement opportunities.
17. Other _____

C. I will base the value of this convention primarily on:

18. How much I enjoy myself.
19. How many new ideas I acquire.
20. How many acquaintances I make.
21. Other _____

D. I will be satisfied with the convention:

22. If I become aware of a new concept, idea, program or skill.
23. If the program I am presenting is a success.
24. If I leave with five good candidates' names for position openings at my institution.
25. Other _____